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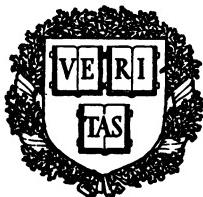
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# AMERICAN ENGLISH.

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# AMERICAN ENGLISH.

BY GILBERT M. TUCKER.

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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ALBANY INSTITUTE,

JUNE 6, 1882,  
WITH REVISION AND ADDITIONS.

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FROM TRANSACTIONS OF THE INSTITUTE, VOL. X.

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## AMERICAN ENGLISH.

BY GILBERT M. TUCKER.

[Read before the Albany Institute, June 6, 1882.]

"And you may have a pretty considerable good sort of a feeble notion that it don't fit nohow ; and that it ain't calculated to make you smart overmuch ; and that you don't feel 'special bright, and by no means first-rate, and not at all tonguey ; and that, however rowdy you may be by natur', it does use you up com-plete, and that's a fact; and makes you quake considerable, and disposed toe damn the engine!—All of which phrases, I beg to add, are pure Americanisms of the first water."—*Charles Dickens, Letter to John Forster, February, 1842.*

The time-honored jokes about the "American language," if not entirely antiquated, have at least for the most part changed their longitude to a meridian considerably east of that of Greenwich. A recent attempt dates from the land of the Pharaohs. Riaz Pacha, late President of the Egyptian Council, is said to have retorted, on being rallied by an American for supporting so patiently the British yoke, that in one respect at least the English were making greater progress in the United States than in the East, inasmuch as he was credibly informed that their language was now almost universally spoken among the Americans! This is perhaps endurable; but it would subject one's politeness to a pretty severe strain, now-a-days, to be expected to appear greatly amused at a story about compliments paid in Great Britain to the good English spoken by some exceptional traveler from New York or Boston. Serious references, moreover, like that of Dean Alford; to "the process of deterioration which our Queen's English has undergone at the hands of the Americans,"\* are not often found in British publications of very recent date, except when accompanied (as was the dean's) by some display of insular prejudice or crass ignorance in regard to the history, geography or politics of the United States, such as would naturally disqualify the writer, in the mind of an impartial judge, as a critic of anything pertaining to this country. The testimony of well-informed British writers of the present day is, in fact, more generally in accord with that of Sir George Campbell: "Of the body of the [American] people it may be said that their language is a little better than that used in any county of England."†

Yet the pages of so important a periodical as the London *Nineteenth*

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\*The Queen's English, 11th thousand, ¶8.

†"White and Black."

*Century* gave place not long ago\* to an article, by Mr. Fitzedward Hall, in which it is gravely, as well as elegantly, stated that William Cullen Bryant lived "among a people among whom our language is daily becoming more and more depraved," and that whoever compares the diction of "Edgar Huntly," a forgotten novel published in 1799, with Mr. Bryant's letters, "the English of which is not much worse than that of ninety-nine out of every hundred of his college-bred compatriots, will very soon become aware to what degree the art of writing our language has declined among educated" people in the United States!

That such rubbish should be written by a recognized authority in philology ceases to be surprising when it is understood that the author is—not a Briton, as might be supposed, but one of those extraordinary Americans of the Henry James, Jr., stripe who seem to regard it rather as matter of regret than otherwise that they were not born in Europe.† Yet that the editor of such a magazine as that in which this effusion appeared should think it worth while to print and presumably to pay for it, is a phenomenon which suggests two interesting reflections. The first, of comparatively minor importance, is merely that our English cousins have a good deal yet to learn about our common language as used in the two countries. The second is, that where there is so much smoke there must be some flame. That is, making all allowances, there must really exist certain noticeable variations between the styles of writing and speaking that are current on the opposite sides of the Atlantic; for if no differences at all could be found, it is hardly probable that an intelligent man, however strongly British his prepossessions, would care to publish a dissertation in which our practice is deliberately set down as distinctly inferior to that of his own nation. In what these differences consist, and in what particulars the mother tongue may be thought to have become especially "depraved" in this country, are questions deserving attention.

## I.

In the first place, it will hardly be denied in any quarter that the speech of the United States is quite unlike that of Great Britain in

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\*Issue of September, 1880.

† Or he may remind some readers of "Mr. Carroll Gansevoort" in Edgar Fawcett's bright story, "A Gentleman of Leisure." Mr. Gansevoort, a New Yorker by birth, who "would consider himself disgraced if he wore a pair of trousers or carried an umbrella that was not of English make," rebukes a friend for committing the frightful Americanism of saying that he fished with a pole (instead of a rod), and upon the culprit's perpetrating the further enormity of speaking of catching four dozen fine trout, remarks: "Upon my word, I beg your pardon, old fellow, but it always amuses them so on the other side when we speak about *catching* fish. There they don't catch them, you know; they kill them!"

the important particular that *we have no dialects*. "I never found any difficulty in understanding an American speaker," writes the historian Freeman;\* "but I have often found it difficult to understand \* \* \* a northern-English speaker." Trifling variations in pronunciation, and in the use of a few particular words, certainly exist in this country. The Yankee "expects" or "calculates," while the Virginian "reckons;" the illiterate Northerner "claims," and the Southerner of similar class, by a very curious reversal of the blunder, "allows," what better educated people merely assert. The pails and pans of the world at large become "buckets" when taken to Kentucky. It is "evening" in Richmond while afternoon still lingers a hundred miles due north at Washington. Vessels go into "docks" on their arrival at Philadelphia, but into "slips" at Mobile; they are tied up to "wharves" at Boston and Savannah, but to "piers" at Chicago and Milwaukee. Distances from place to place are measured by "squares" in Baltimore, by "blocks" in New York. The "shilling" of our own State is the "levy" of Pennsylvania, the "bit" of San Francisco, the "ninepence" of old New England, and the "escalan" of New Orleans. But put all these variations together, with such others as more microscopic examination might reveal, and how far short they fall of representing anything like the real dialectic differences of speech that obtain, and always have obtained, not only as between the three kingdoms, but even between contiguous sections of England itself! What great city of this country, for example, has developed, or is likely to develop, any peculiar class of errors at all comparable in fixity and importance to the cockney speech of London? What two regions can be found within our borders, however sequestered and unenlightened, and however widely separated by geographical position, of which the speech of the one presents any difficulty worth mentioning, or even any very startling unsimilarity in sound or construction, to the inhabitant of the other? Our omnipresent railroads, telegraph lines, mail routes and printing presses, and the well-marked disposition of every class of our people to make lavish use of these means of intercommunication, both for the rapid diffusion of intelligence and the interchange of opinion, and also, so far as lines of travel are concerned, for the frequent transportation of the people themselves hither and thither, with a degree of ease and celerity to which no other country has ever attained—these causes have always favored, and seem likely permanently to maintain, a cer-

\*Article, "Some Impressions of the United States," published in the Fortnightly Review, and copied into the Eclectic for October, 1882, p. 485, and Littell for September 9, 1882, No. 1994, p. 602.

tain community of expression as well as of thought, that is not only practically prohibitive of the formation of new dialects, but also rapidly effaces the prominent lineaments of such variations as have at different times been imported from the old world. If then, in this particular respect, we are depraving our mother tongue, the only logical inference that can be drawn is, that a language reaches its best estate in proportion as it is diversified by local peculiarities.

It ought to be remembered also, in this immediate connection, that the ordinary speech of the United States presents not greatly more of what may be called caste variations than of those that are attributable to differences of locality. A discriminating English traveler, the Rev. F. Barham Zincke, Vicar of Wherstead and Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the Queen, has mentioned as "a remarkable fact that the English spoken in America is not only very pure, but also is spoken with equal purity by all classes. \* \* The language in every man's mouth," he adds, "is that of literature and society. \* \* It is even the language of the negroes of the towns."\* In other words, the speech of the lower orders of our people, even down to the very substrata, whether examined in regard to its vocabulary, its construction or its pronunciation, differs from what all admit to be standard correctness in a much smaller degree than we have every reason to believe to be the case in England, our enemies themselves being judges. A careful comparison of slang dictionaries, I think, will reveal a far longer list of unauthorized words as current among British thieves and "cadgers" than among their congeners in the United States. Grammatical rules are violated badly enough by the ignorant of our own cities every day, no doubt; but how often, after all, will you hear from intelligent and respectable working people of American descent quite such a solecism as the "I were" and "he were" that are so frequently noticed in the mouths of lower-middle-class Britons, accustomed all their lives to conversation with speakers of the purest English? And as for pronunciation, we have our faults, of course, in abundance, the best of us as well as the most careless, and should amend them with all diligence; but where, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, will you discover any such utter disability of hearing or discernment as can permit men to drop or multiply their *h*'s or transpose their *w*'s and *v*'s?

## II.

Speaking of pronunciation, and with regard to the sound of the language as used by the educated people of the two countries (a point

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\*"Last Winter in the United States;" John Murray, London, 1863.

which most writers on Americanisms pass over with the briefest notice, though one of the ablest of them all, Prof. George P. Marsh, has devoted to it his chief attention), it must be admitted, I think, that if the typical English intonation is better than ours, it is because the office of language is what Talleyrand said it was—to conceal one's thought. That is to say, the average American college graduate, for instance, will speak more intelligibly and more agreeably wherever there is any difficulty in speaking, as before a large assembly or in the open air, than will the English university man. The Yankee may talk through his nose, to be sure; may unduly emphasize minor words, cut off terminal letters rather abruptly, or select too high a key; but he will not gulp or sputter; he will seldom insert superfluous *aw's* or *ugh's*, and the reporter who may have to follow his utterance will be far less liable to lose parts of a sentence, or to mistake one phrase for another, than in discharging the same duty on the other side.

And when it comes to orthoepy proper, the deliberate sounding of single words, it will be found that in almost every case the difference is due to the American's following more closely than does the Briton the spelling of the word—a practice which can hardly result in depraving the language, but seems rather to suggest that the American is the greater reader of the two, and therefore likely to be the safer guide in questions of verbal correctness. Thus the now thoroughly anglicized French word *trait*, in which none of us ever thinks of dropping the final *t*, is still commonly called *tray* in England, and that pronunciation is given the place of honor in the best British authority, Stormonth's excellent dictionary. *Sliver*, which very many Americans call *sliver*, following the obvious analogy of the more common word *liver*, and following, too, the example of the poet Chaucer, is *sliver* and *sliver* only, at present in Great Britain. *Schedule*, which we invariably pronounce *skedule*, constitutes in England almost the only exception to the rule that *ch* is hard after initial *s*, being there called *shedule*.

And in respect to geographical names, the closer adherence of our countrymen to the guidance of the orthography is, of course, notorious and manifest. Except the dropping, in imitation of the French, of the final *s* of *Illinois*; the two words *Connecticut* and *Arkansas* (the latter a very doubtful exception); and a few terms like *Sioux*, derived from corruptions of Indian names—I can hardly recall any geographical appellation indigenous to our soil which is not pronounced very nearly as it is spelled. And when names are imported with a well-authorized divergence between the sound and the spelling, a strong

tendency toward the obliteration of this divergence is sure to become manifest. *Warwick* is about as often *Warwick* as *War'ick* when spoken of in America ; *Norwich* is more commonly *Norwich*, I think, than *Noridge*; *St. Louis* and *Louisville* are often called *St. Lewis* and *Lewisville*; a resident of Delaware County in this State would not know what place was meant if you spoke of the county seat as "Daily," so perfectly settled is "Delhi" as the pronunciation as well as the spelling of the name. A multitude of other instances might be mentioned, among the most remarkable of which, perhaps, is the change that has taken place in the popular sounding of the name *Chautauqua*. As long as it was spelled with a final *e*, people persisted in saying *Chautawk*, notwithstanding that the local practice was always otherwise ; but an immediate reformation was effected, some twenty years ago, by the simple expedient of substituting an *a*. It is probably quite safe to say that no mispronunciation of a geographical name, growing out of an attempt to follow too closely the sound of its letters, has ever become so prevalent in Great Britain as even to suggest the idea of making the spelling conform to the orthoepy, and, furthermore, that if such a difficulty occurred, the attempted remedy in question would be found in that country quite unproductive of any change in the popular usage.

### III.

Passing from orthoepy to orthography, it hardly need be said that in every instance without exception where a change in spelling has originated in the United States, the change has been in the direction of simplicity, and in the interest therefore of the "reform" which the Philological Society of Great Britain (not to mention such individual names as Max Müller, Dr. J. H. Murray, Prof. Newman, the Duke of Richmond, and Mr. Gladstone) so warmly favors. The dropping of the second *g* in *waggon*, the *u* in *parlour* and similar words, the *e* in *storey* (of a house), and the final *e* in *pease*\* (plural of *pea*), are all changes in this direction ; and so is the substitution of *w* for *ugh* in *plough*, and *f* for *ugh* in *, and the abandonment of the spellings *shew*, *cyder*, † and especially *gaol*, the universal adoption of *jail* bringing the word into harmony with the rest of the language, as there is no other instance in English of a soft *g* before *a*—notwithstanding that some absurd people, who do not call Margaret *Marjaret* or Garfield *Jarfield*, will persist in saying *oleomargarine*.*

\* Of course *pease* was not originally a plural word, but nobody thinks of it otherwise now.

† See Halliwell's Dictionary, art. "Griggles."

## IV.

In respect to at least one American spelling, that of *plow*, and probably others, it should not be forgotten that the prevalent practice in this country, though an indisputable innovation so far as modern usage is concerned, is really a return to the long abandoned custom of an earlier time, from which divergence without good reason has gradually grown up in England. And this brings us to another strongly marked characteristic of our American speech — its greater permanence and steadiness, so to speak, as compared with that of the mother country. Such a change of fashion as has occurred in London in respect to a lady's robe, which was universally called a "dress" a dozen years ago, afterwards a "gown," and now a "frock"—the words "dress" and "gown" being accounted alike vulgar at present — such a change as that would be well-nigh impossible in New York. The same peculiarity will appear very clearly, where it might least be expected, on close examination of any list of words supposed to have been greatly distorted in their meaning, or even manufactured out of whole cloth, by erring Yankees, a very large proportion of which will almost always be found to be good old English, grown obsolescent or obsolete at home, but preserved in the New World in their pristine vitality and force ; and conversely, on examining such a book as Halliwell's Dictionary of Archaisms and Provincialisms, which contains, presumably, no word now in good use in Great Britain in the meaning given, the American reader will discover a great number of terms—nearly three hundred, I should say—with which he is perfectly familiar. I give a few examples, not including any that are marked as provincial, the direct inference being that all these words were once good English, but are no longer in common use in the mother country :

*Adze* (a carpenter's tool); *affectation* ("a curious desire for a thing which nature hath not given"); *afterclap*; *agape*; *age* as a verb; *air* in the sense of appearance; *amerce*; *andirons*; *angry*, said of a wound; *appellant* (one who appeals); *apple-pie order*; *baker's dozen*; *bamboozle*; *bay* in a barn; *bay* window; *bearers* at a funeral; *berate*; *between whiles*; *bicker*; *blanch* (to whiten); *brain* as a verb; *burly*; *cast* (to tie and throw down, as a horse); *catcall*; *cesspool*; *chafe* (to grow angry); *coldhopper*; *clutch* (to seize); *clutter*; *cockerel*; *coddle*; *copious*; *cosey*; *counterfeit money*; *crazy* in the sense of dilapidated, as applied to a building; *crock* (an earthen vessel); *crone* (an old woman); *crook* (a bend); *croon*; *cross-grained* in the sense of obstinate or peevish; *cross-patch*; *cross purposes*; *cuddle*; *cuff* (to beat); *deft*; *din*; *dormer window*; *earnest money* given to bind a bargain; *egg on*; *greenhorn*; *hasp*; *jack of all trades*; *jamb* of a door; *lintel*; *list* (selvage of cloth); *loop hole*; *nettled* (out of temper); *newel*; *ornate*; *perforce*; *piping hot*; *pit*

(mark left by small-pox); *quail* (to shrink); *ragamuffin*; *riffraff*; *rigmarole*; *scant*; *seedy* ("miserable looking"); *shingles*; *sorrel* (the color); *out of sorts*; *stale* ("wanting freshness"); *sutler*; *thill*; *toady*; *trash*; *underpinning*. All these words, with many others equally familiar in the United States, are apparently regarded by Halliwell as having become obsolete in England.

It would not be difficult, on the other hand, to compile quite a list of Briticisms, including words recently invented in Great Britain, like *totalling*, or (still worse) *tottling*, for adding up; *navvy*, for laborer; *fad*, for pastime \*; *randomly*, for at random; *outing*, for pleasure excursion; *tund*, for beat †; and a larger class of old words now used in that country in a comparatively new and in some respects objectionable signification not generally recognized in the United States.

I remember hearing with astonishment, a dozen years ago, from an English gentleman of culture and high social standing, that it was necessary to remove the gates of Quebec, "to give more room for traffic." I asked no questions, but wondered inwardly whether the people of the American Gibraltar were in the habit, like the ancient Orientals, of resorting to the gates of the town to exchange commodities with each other. On our arrival, next morning, the mystery was solved; it was travel, not barter, that my friend meant by traffic. The word is continually thus misused in England, and it must be sorrowfully admitted that the bad habit is now slowly invading this country as well, not so much among the people, however, as in a kind of technical way. The New York Central Railroad, for instance, has a "general traffic manager," who certainly manages no traffic, the corporation being carriers and not traders.

Other examples—as yet, happily, not naturalized in American usage—are: *Knocked-up*, for fatigued; *Famous*, for excellent—"we have had a famous walk," meaning an enjoyable one; *bargain*, for haggle‡—"Mr. Boffin, I never bargain," says Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* (Book I, chapter 5)—he was bargaining at that very moment; *tiresome*, for disagreeable; the particularly refined and elegant expression *rot*, for nonsense; *jug*, for pitcher; *good form*, for in good taste; *trap*, for carriage; *tub*, for bathe; to *wire*, for to telegraph; *starved*, for frozen; *stop*, for stay—"not that she would mind, if I were to stop out till midnight," says Cynthia Walters, in *Mallock's Romance of the*

\* "It is your favorite *fad* to draw plans"—Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, Book I, chap. 4.

† Even Spencer condescends to the use of this extraordinary vocable, though he offers a sort of semi-apology by putting it in quotation marks—*Study of Sociology*, chap. 8.

‡ The anonymous author of Chatto and Windus' *Slang Dictionary* (new edition, London, 1874) falls into this error, which surely ought not to be expected of a lexicographer. See page 358 of the work referred to.

Nineteenth Century (Book III, chapter 1); *assist*, for be present, as the silent auditors at a concert are absurdly said to "assist" at it; *plant* for fixtures, as the "plant" of a railway or a factory (I am not entirely certain about the last two words, but believe them to be comparatively new in England and very rarely used in the United States); *intimate*, for announce—advertisers in British newspapers continually "intimate" to their customers that they have changed their quarters or received new goods; and *tidy*, for almost anything complimentary—a London paper made mention the other day of "a very tidy bull," the writer meaning a valuable animal, and by no means intending to refer to any particular cleanliness in the beast's personal habits. English hostlers also—to get pretty well down in the social scale, though by no means going as low as do the compilers of what are termed Americanisms, in their search for blunders—English hostlers sometimes speak of *chilling* cold water, meaning warming it, an extraordinary perversion of a very common and elementary word.

It is not only, however, in their recent coinages and anomalous assigning of new meanings to old terms, that the English have made reckless changes in the body of our speech where the American practice adheres to the former standard. They have swung off in the opposite direction also, curtailing to no good purpose the significance of several words. A "young person," I believe, is always a girl in England, the term being never applied to a boy. An invalid is "ill," not sick, unless he happens to be nauseated, while at the same time, strangely enough, it is regarded as perfectly proper to describe him as confined to a sick-room or stretched upon a sick-bed. A Briton is horrified at the idea of *riding* in a carriage, although he makes no scruple of riding in an omnibus or a street-car. When you enter the vehicle at the side, you drive; when at the end, you ride. And if the author of Macleod of Dare is a trustworthy guide, the word *up*, used in reference to a journey in Great Britain, indicates, not that the traveler is seeking a more elevated region or moving northwardly, but solely that he is going toward the capital; "up to London" and "down to the Highlands" are, it appears, the correct formulæ. No wonder the young Scotchman thought it sounded "stupid." Fancy a man in Chicago saying that he was going "up to Washington," or a man in Washington speaking of events occurring "down in St. Paul!"

A third kind of variation that seems to have grown up in Great Britain to a greater degree than in this country, is the habit of turn-

ing active and especially reflexive verbs into neuters by dropping the object, as, "Don't trouble" for "Don't trouble yourself."\* It is true that a tendency in this direction can be traced a long way back in the history of the language. To *repent*, to *endeavor*, and some other now neuter verbs, were formerly reflexives; one *endeavored himself* in the same sense that we now *apply ourselves*, and *repented himself* as we now *bethink ourselves*. It is also true that a few alterations of this kind not yet sanctioned by good usage, but occasionally heard, may be said properly enough to be common to the two countries; "I avail of this opportunity," for "I avail myself of this opportunity," is one. But I think any careful reader of the now current literature of England and the United States will approve the opinion that our British brethren are going much faster in this direction than are we. As long ago as 1854 Miss Yonge wrote (in *Heartsease*, Part II, chapter 10): "Theodora flung away and was rushing off." Charles Reade, whom the astute Fitzedward Hall ranks among "the choicest of living English writers,"† is guilty of such phrases as "Wardlaw whipped before him" (*Foul Play*, chapter 15). "Ransome whipped before it" (*Put Yourself in his Place*, chapter 31), [Little] "flung out of the room" (same, chapter 32), and various others. These and similar incomplete sentences, not at all uncommon in British books and periodicals, certainly strike the American ear as decided innovations, and constitute a peculiarity of diction very rarely to be observed on this side of the water.

The English have also a practice, more pronounced by far than our own, of abbreviating a good many words in their common talk. They never call their consolidated government bonds anything but "consols," or the process of hypothecation anything but "hypothec." The Zoölogical Gardens in London are commonly known as the "Zoo," and a series of delightful popular concerts given every season in the same city are euphoniously denominated the "Monday pops." Hampshire, not in writing only, but in speech as well, is "Hants," Buckinghamshire is "Bucks," and Hertfordshire "Herts." A similar liberty is taken with the names of firms; "Smith & Co." is often made to do duty, even in formal business letters, for the established title, "Smith, Brown & Robinson." One American establishment — of somewhat British propensities, however — Messrs. Ticknor & Fields of Boston, did at one time imitate this form of contraction, by gilding

\* "We do not trouble to inquire"—*London Law Times*, quoted in *Albany Law Journal*, vol. 26, p. 121.

† *Scribner's Monthly*, vol. 8, p. 701.

"Ticknor & Co.," on the backs of their books; but the practice has been abandoned by their successors, and I do not know that any other American house ever followed the example. Certain it is that about the longest and most awkward name in the book trade at present, "Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.," is always written in full in this country, though often contracted into Cassell & Co., in England.

In the construction of many sentences, however, an opposite plan is frequently followed — the insertion of utterly superfluous words. Thus one occasionally hears English ladies ask, "Whatever are you doing?" — meaning, "What are you doing?" In Herbert Spencer's admirable treatise on Education, chap. 10, we read that "in Russia the infant mortality is *something* enormous;" and in one of Charles Dickens' letters to Mr. Forster, "the daily difference in a [a ship's] rolling, as she burns the coals out, is *something* absolutely fearful;\*" few Americans would have put in the "something." And who has not been annoyed and disgusted by the innumerable *got's* with which so many English pages fairly bristle? Three good illustrations occur in a single article, "A Few Words about the Nineteenth Century," by Frederic Harrison, recently published in the Fortnightly Review: "He extolled him for possessing all the good qualities which he had not *got*;" "for twenty thousand years man has *got* no better light than what was given by pitch, tallow or oil;" "I don't say but what this work has *got* to be done." Or glance over Endymion: "He has *got* a champion" (chap. 35); "I have *got* some House of Commons men dining with me" (chap. 50); "I have *got* a horse which I should like you to ride" (chap. 52); "Lady Montford maintained they had *got* nothing" (*id.*); "All you have *got* to do is to make up your mind" (chap. 65); "You have *got* a great deal of private bussness to attend to" (chap. 99). So the Marquis of Blandford, in the North American Review for November, 1881, p. 459: "The Irish members are a feature which we have not at present *got* to deal with"; Spencer in the book just referred to (Education, chap. 3): "Must not the child judge by such evidence as he has *got*?" George Augustus Sala, Illustrated London News, October 2, 1880, p. 423: "To my shame, I have not *got* a Cowden-Clarke's concordance;" Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife*, chap. 9: "I have *got* a letter for you;" and in Marion Fay, chap. 3: "'He has *got* money;' 'but he is not therefore to be a tyrant;' 'Yes, he is, over a daughter who has *got* none;'" Charles Reade, *Foul Play*, chap. 19: "I have *got* something for you" — in none of which cases is the idea of *getting* intended in the slightest degree to be implied,

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\*"A Short Life of Charles Dickens," Appletons' Handy Volume Series, p. 116.

but only that of present possession. The general American dislike of this ugly word, and our practice, where the past participle of the verb *get* must be used, of adopting the old and softer form *gotten* (which is now scarcely ever used in England)\* are not exactly what would be expected of a people who are ruining the language.

## V

I think moreover, though the opinion is of course only an opinion, and hardly susceptible of positive proof or absolute negation, that good English authors in general are less particular about many points of grammar than are Americans of the same class. Dean Alford is authority for the statement that "our best writers [meaning the best British writers] have the popular expression *these kind, those sort*,"† where *this kind* or *that sort* is intended; and I have noticed instances of this solecism in Bagehot (*Physics and Politics*, No. II, section 3—"Nations with *these sort* of maxims"), and in Miss Muloch (*Agatha's Husband*, chap. 1—"The Iansons were *those sort* of religious people who think any Biblical allusions irreverent.") In a story called "*The Ladies Lindores*," published serially in *Blackwood* (Part II, chap. 4, No. 799 of the magazine, May, 1882) we find the following. "There are some happy writers whose mission it is to expound the manners and customs of the great. \* \* And yet, alas! to these writers when they have done all, yet must we add that they fail to satisfy their models. \* \* 'As if *these sort* of people knew anything about society!' Lady Adeliza says." Lady Adeliza, or her reporter, would do well to study a certain very elementary rule of grammar.

Worse than this, perhaps, is Charles Reade's occasional blundering with the nominative and objective cases, as where he makes the high-born and elegant Edward Fountain, Esq., of Font Abbey, inform his niece that "there will be only *us* two at dinner!" (*Love me Little, Love me Long*, chap. 1.) Worse still is the confusing of the verbs *lie* and *lay*, an error very rarely to be observed in respectable American society, but one to which Alford says Eton graduates are especially prone—and of which a striking instance may be found in an extraordinary place for a grammatical error, Stormonth's English Word-Book, where *laid* is actually given as the participle of *lie!* After noting this, one need hardly be surprised to find the same writer defining *Alborak* (in the supplement to his dictionary) as "the white

\*See "English and American English," by R. A. Proctor, in the Gentleman's Magazine, copied into Appleton's Journal for October, 1881, and the New York Tribune of Aug. 14, 1881.

†*The Queen's English*, 11th thousand, ¶ 98.

mule on which Mohammed is said *to have rode* from Jerusalem to heaven!" If an American lexicographer were caught using *laid* for *lain*, or *rode* for *ridden*, what a text it would furnish for a dissertation on the process of depraving our mother tongue which is advancing with such alarming rapidity in the United States!

And there are certain highly incorrect constructions, like "different to," which are notoriously British, and of which it is almost safe to say that no American is ever guilty. Spencer's "immediately this is recognized" (*Study of Sociology*, chap. 2), meaning *as soon as this is recognized*, and Buckle's "directly they came" (letter to Mrs. Grey, quoted in Huth's *Life*, chap. 2) meaning *directly after they had come*, are other instances. Buckle, it should be remembered, was anything, but a careless writer, having devoted great labor for a long time to the acquisition of a correct and polished style of composition. One would think he need not have spent many hours in this sort of study before discovering that such a sentence as "I put them away directly they came" is not English. (Since writing the last sentence, I have noticed, with disgust, an instance of exactly the same error in one of G. W. Smalley's letters from London to the *New York Tribune*, published April 24, 1882: "Directly he heard of the intended demonstration, Mr. Parnell left the train." But Mr. Smalley, like the lady in "*The Mighty Dollar*," has "has lived so much abroad, you know," that some absorption of British blunders might well be expected of him; and I think one might spend a good deal of time in searching American literature, periodical or book, before he would find another case.)

Mr. Fitzedward Hall, as already quoted, is of opinion that educated people in this country have lost the ability to write our language as did the author of "*Edgar Huntly*" eighty years ago. But what must we think of the improvement that has been made on the other side of the sea when he turns the pages of *Endymion* and notices the following, among other phrases of similar correctness and beauty? "*Everybody says what they like*" (chap. 20); "*I would never leave him for a moment, only I know he would get wearied of me*" (chap. 39); "*I have never been back to the old place*" (chap. 63); *Everybody can do exactly what they like*" (chap. 98). Speaking in all seriousness; were it not on the whole preferable that the art of writing English should decline everywhere even faster than it has declined in this country since the close of the last century, rather than that it should develop into such perfection as is illustrated by the last literary production of an ex-prime-minister of Great Britain?

## VI.

Of course nobody thinks of denying, nevertheless, that a number of new, and in many cases uncalled-for, words and expressions have been invented and now pass current in the United States, or that the meaning of some others has been gradually warped, to the injury of the language, just as has occurred in England. This part of the subject has been laboriously investigated by several diligent students—so laboriously that there is little left to say about it except in the way of correction. Not to speak of articles in periodicals, brief essays, and single chapters, no less than five books devoted entirely to so-called Americanisms in speech have from time to time appeared—Pickering's Vocabulary, in 1816; Noah Webster's "Letter," in 1817; Elwyn's Glossary, in 1859; Schele de Vere's Americanisms, in 1872; and Bartlett's Dictionary—most comprehensive of all, and now the standard book of reference—of which the first edition was published in 1848, the second in 1859, the third in 1860, and the fourth, considerably enlarged, in 1877. The student of language will find much to interest, and not a little to amuse him, in each of these compilations of monstrosities.

## VII.

John Pickering's "VOCABULARY, OR COLLECTION OF WORDS AND PHRASES which have been supposed to be peculiar to the United States," originated in the author's practice, while living in London during the first two years of this century, of noting down, for the purpose of avoiding them, such of his own verbal expressions as were condemned for American errors by his British friends. After returning to this country, he communicated a paper on the subject, consisting of an essay and a list of words, to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and shortly after, having largely amplified the vocabulary, submitted the whole to the candor of his countrymen for their instruction and admonition. The poor man was deeply concerned for the future of the language in America, and very much in earnest in his work. It might indeed be a long time, he thought, before it should "be the lot of many Americans to publish works which will be read out of their own country; yet all who have the least tincture of learning will continue to feel an ardent desire to acquaint themselves with English authors. Let us then," he proceeds, "imagine the time to have arrived when Americans shall no longer be able to understand the works of Milton, Pope, Swift, Addison and other English authors justly styled classic without the aid of a translation

into a language that is to be called at some future day the American tongue! \* \* \* Nor is this the only view in which a radical change of language would be an evil. To say nothing of the facilities afforded by a common language in the ordinary intercourse of business, it should not be forgotten that our religion and our laws are studied in the language of the nation from which we are descended; and, with the loss of the language, we should finally suffer the loss of those peculiar advantages which we now derive from the investigations of the jurists and divines of that country."

To do what lay in his power to avert a calamity so appalling, was the object that Mr. Pickering had in view; and lest his own impressions should be faulty, or his imperfect knowledge of pure English should prove inadequate to the task of properly branding all the principal American corruptions, he took the pains of submitting his list to several well informed friends, and particularly to two English gentlemen whose authority he considered beyond question, although he admits that as they had lived some twenty years in America, "their ear had lost much of that sensibility to deviations from the pure English idiom which would once have enabled them to pronounce with decision in cases where they now felt doubts." As finally published, the Vocabulary contains over five hundred words, of which not more than about seventy, less than a seventh of the whole number, are really of American origin and now in respectable use. As examples may be cited — *backwoodsman, barbecue, belittle, bookstore, bottomlands, breadstuff, caucus, clapboard, creek* in the sense of brook or small stream, *declension* of an office, *deed* as a verb, *desk* for pulpit, *dutiable*, to *girdle* a tree, *gubernatorial, hominy, intervalle, salt-lick, lot*—a division of land, *lumber, offset, pine barrens, portage, rapids, renewedly, samp, section* of the country, *sleigh, span* of horses, and *staging* for scaffolding. The other six-sevenths of the book consists of, first, mere vulgarisms and blunders; second, unauthorized expressions invented by eccentric writers and never generally adopted; and, third, of words really British in their origin though not current in good London society — to which last class, by the way, it is highly probable that several of the terms above mentioned as genuine Americanisms might be transferred, were their full history known.

The Vocabulary was reviewed by Noah Webster in a letter to the author, published at Boston in 1817, and by Dr. Beck in a paper read before this Institute, March 18, 1829, and included in the first volume of the *Transactions*.

## VIII.

Dr. Elwyn's GLOSSARY OF SUPPOSED AMERICANISMS was undertaken, as the preface informs us, "to show how much there yet remains, in this country, of language and customs directly brought from our remotest ancestry"—a purpose quite different from that of Mr. Pickering; but the chief value of the book, in my estimation, lies in the contribution it makes to our knowledge of Pennsylvania provincialisms, of which the author is evidently a careful observer. About four hundred and sixty words are included, of which I will venture to say that a clear majority would be quite as little understood in decent American as in decent British society; but it seems that we have been accused of manufacturing the whole list, while the fact is that they are one and all of foreign origin. The book is carelessly written, and not accurately alphabetized.

## IX.

Schele de Vere's "AMERICANISMS," a small octavo of something less than seven hundred pages, differs from the other works mentioned in not adopting the dictionary form, but presenting our verbal peculiarities as arranged in various classes—those invented by the Indian, the Dutchman, the Frenchman, the Spaniard, the German, the Negro, and the Chinaman; expressions peculiar to the West, to the church, to politics and to trade; marine and railroad terms; cant and slang; new words and nicknames, etc. The author has been accused of plagiarizing from Bartlett, and doubtless did avail himself freely of the labors of that diligent lexicographer; but he added a good deal of original matter, and his book possesses an interest of its own, being indeed the only one of the four that is likely to be read entirely through. About four thousand items appear in the index.

## X.

BARTLETT'S DICTIONARY (or, to give the full title, "Dictionary of Americanisms, a Glossary of Words and Phrases usually regarded as peculiar to the United States, by John Russell Bartlett") is, in its latest edition, a bulky octavo of over eight hundred pages, exceedingly well printed, and containing something above five thousand six hundred entries, but hardly representing, I think, more than about five hundred and fifty genuine and distinct Americanisms now in decent use—less than one-tenth of the whole number of articles. Of the remainder, nearly four hundred words and phrases are set down by the author himself as of British origin, some being used in this country in exactly the same manner as on their native soil, while others have been slightly al-

tered in meaning, application or sound. At least a hundred and seventy-five more—and probably a much larger number—are also certainly British, though Mr. Bartlett seems not to be aware of it. The rest of the dictionary—say four-fifths—is made up, partly of expressions never in general use, or long since antiquated; partly of mere mispronunciations, grammatical errors and unauthorized contractions; partly of vulgar and disgusting slang; and partly of wearisome repetitions. Yet I by no means desire to be understood as setting down the work for a mass of rubbish. On the contrary, it contains a vast fund of interesting and curious information, which any man devoted to the study of English dialects might well be proud to have brought together. Only it is a great pity that the diligent compiler, in his anxiety to make a big book, allowed himself such extreme latitude in his conception of what constitutes an Americanism in speech, and consequently buried his grains of wheat under so appalling a mountain of chaff.

It may be worth while to present some samples of the words that are improperly included in Bartlett's Dictionary, as showing the means by which a tremendous number of pseudo-Americanisms have been, first and last, accumulated by people who find satisfaction in counting them up.

Of the three hundred and eighty-five words and phrases that the author himself sets down as of British origin, the following examples may be mentioned :

To beat one *all-to-pieces*, or *all-to-smash*; *allow*, for assert; *argufy*; *awfully*, for very; *bail*, the handle of a bucket; *barm*, for yeast; *bound*, for determined or resolved; a *bull*, on the stock exchange; *bumptious*, for self-conceited; *can't come it*; *cap sheaf*; *cheek*, for impudence; *chowder*; *clip*, a blow, as, "he hit him a clip;" to *collide*; to *cotton* to a man; *cracker*, for a small biscuit; *cute*; to *cut stick*; a *deck* of cards; *deputize*; *doxologize*; *dreadful*, for very, as "dreadful" fine; *every once in a while*; *fall* of the year; *first-rate*; *fix*, to put in order; *flapjack*; *flummux*; *freshet*; *gallivant*; *galoshes*; *given name*; *goodies*; to *gulp*; *hand-running*; *hard up*; *heft*, for weight; *help*, for servants; *homely*, not handsome; *hook*, to steal; *immigration*; *jeopardize*; *julep*; to *keep company*; to *loan*; *mad*, for angry; *mighty*, for very; *old fogey*; *over the left*; *pair of stairs*; *pled*, for pleaded; *pry*, a lever; to *pull up stakes*; to *reckon*, meaning to think, believe or suppose; *reliable*; *rooster*; *no great shakes*; *sophomore*; *spell* of weather; *spry*; *spunk*; *starvation*; *stricken*, for struck; *sundown*; *swap*; to *take on*; *talented*; *teetotaller*; *ugly*, for ill-tempered; to *wallop*, and to *whale*; *whapper*; to *whittle*, and to *wilt*. In many cases no reason whatever is assigned for including these words in a list of Americanisms; very seldom is any better cause mentioned than that they are provincial or antiquated in Great Britain; and sometimes the pretext

is of the most trivial character, as in the case of the word *whittle*, which is put in, forsooth, because both the verb and the practice are thought to be more common in America than in England! But the most surprising instance among this class of words has yet to be mentioned — the use of the adverb “*immediately*,” in place of the phrase “as soon as”—“the deer fell dead immediately they shot him.” This wretched expression, Mr. Bartlett writes, is creeping into use from England. What possible sense there can be in counting as an Americanism a villainously ungrammatical construction which is “creeping into use in this country from England,” it would puzzle Fitzedward Hall himself to explain.

Among words and phrases erroneously supposed by Mr. Bartlett to be peculiar to this country, the following have been pointed out by various reviewers of the dictionary :

*Baggage*; *bender*, a spree; *blackberry*; *blow*, to brag; *bluff*, a high bank; to do a thing *brown*; *bug*, as a general term; *bureau*, a chest of drawers; *catamount*; *choker*, a cravat; *chore*; *crevasse*; *cunning*, in the sense of small and pretty; *educational*; *eelgrass*; to *egg on*; *engineer* of a locomotive; *every which way*; *expect*, for suppose; *fast*, for dissipated; *fellowship*, as a verb; *female*, for woman; *first-class*; to *go to the bad*; to *go gunning*; *in a horn*, meaning “over the left;” *kink*, an accidental knot or twist; the whole *kit* of them; *muss*, a state of confusion; *notions*, small wares or trifles; *railroad*, as the equivalent of railway; *sappy*, meaning silly; *slosh*, soft mud; *smack*, a blow; *spurge*; *spree*; *swingletree*; *a good time*; and *tiptop*.

To these may be added the following, which I believe no reviewer has noticed :

*Ampersand*—The short character for the word *and*. This is found in Halliwell.

*Beef*, an ox, and *Blaze*, a mark on a tree, are both in Halliwell.

*Clever*, in the sense of good-natured. This is in Halliwell—said to be provincial in the south of England.

*Cookey*—A little cake. In Prof. J. F. W. Johnston’s “Notes on North America,” chap. 23, vol. 2, p. 296, we read that this word is familiar to a Scotchman’s ears.

*Cradle Scythe* is in Halliwell.

*Firedogs*—Andirons. This is found in Brockett’s Glossary of North-Country Words.

*Hulking* (unwieldy), *Jack-at-a-pinch*, and *Pitch-in*, are all in Halliwell.

*Right for very*. Fancy setting this down as an Americanism! Did Mr. Bartlett ever hear of a Right Honorable minister of Great Britain, or ever read the 139th Psalm—“Marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well”?

*To set to rights*. This is said by Elwyn to be an Essex provincialism.

*Safe*—A place of security. This also is in Elwyn, and said to be from Suffolk.

*Sauce*—Impudence. This is in Halliwell.

*Shinny*—A boy's game. This is in Brockett.

*Span*, for *perfectly*. The expression “span new” is as old as Chaucer.

*Stand*, a platform, and *Stock*; equivalent to *cattle*, are both in Halliwell.

*Stop for stay*, as “I am stopping at a hotel.” The insertion of this detestable Briticism in a dictionary of Americanisms, of all places in the world, is one of the absurdities of the book. Everybody who knows anything about the variations of the language as spoken in the two countries knows that it is heard a thousand times in England for once that it is noticed here.

*Too thin*. Here is another Americanism of a very remarkable kind. Smollett was guilty of it, for he wrote, in “Peregrine Pickle” (published 1751), chap. 26 : “This pretext was too thin to impose upon her lover.” And Shakspere, a century and more earlier, in Henry VIII., Act 5, Scene 2, makes the King say : “You were ever good at sudden commendations, Bishop of Winchester. But know I come not to hear such flattery now, and in my presence; they are too thin and base to hide offences.” Other instances could no doubt be found in plenty, if it were worth while to look for them. But when one considers that the phrase is invariably applied—as Smollett applies it—to *pretexts*, coverings, what can be more obvious than that it must necessarily always have been, not only perfectly good English, but the simplest and most natural expression imaginable? The insertion of a phrase like that in a list of Americanisms or any other sort of isms, only shows what follies men may be led into, upon whom the craze for making long compilations has once seized.

*Tophet*—The place of torment. This familiar Biblical term is of course just as much an Americanism as is *Eden*, or *Babylon*, or *Jerusalem*.

*Touch-and-go*. Who does not remember the “touch-and-go young Barnacle” of the Circumlocution Office in Charles Dickens’ “Little Dorrit”?

*Tramp*, a strolling vagabond, is in Halliwell.

“Well,” a meaningless preface to a sentence. The word is twice used in this way by highly-aristocratic speakers in the first chapter of Beaconsfield’s “Endymion.” The author would have been slightly amused if Mr. Bartlett had informed him that he represented Sidney Wilton and William Ferrars as conversing in the American dialect.

It would be unprofitable to detail examples of the mere errors, vulgar expressions and slang terms which Mr. Bartlett enumerates as peculiarly American. A few instances of his senseless repetitions, enlarging the book to no possible good, may be mentioned with less disgust:

“Bankit (French Banquette)” is defined as a sidewalk in Louisiana. Immediately below we have “banquette, the name for the sidewalk

in some of our southern cities." "Bowie," and "bowie-knife" are separately entered. "Breakbone" is "a species of fever," and then follows "breakbone fever," with full definition. "Bulldoze" is "to intimidate," and on the next page we have "to bulldoze," "to intimidate by violent means." "Filibuster" is a freebooter; "filibustering" is "freebooting;" and "to filibuster" is "to acquire by freebooting;" three separate entries. "A loafer" is an idle lounging, and "to loaf" is "to lounge." "To lynch," "lyncher" and "lynch law" are separately explained. "Muss," a corruption of "mess," is first elaborately defined as a noun, with examples, and then as a verb. A "pony" is a translation, and "to pony" is to use a translation. "To post" a person is to inform him, and then we are told that "posted" means informed. "To red up," meaning to set in order, is twice defined — once on page 517 and again on page 520. "To run" is "to cause to run," with the phrase "to run a church" as an example; and just below we find another entry — "to run a church," "to have the charge of a church." "To spin street yarn" (page 636) is "to go gadding about the streets;" and on page 798, under the heading "street yarn," we learn that "to spin street yarn" is "to frequent the streets without any definite object." A "stove pipe" is a tall hat; and then follows a second entry, "stove pipe hat, a tall hat." A "suck in" is "a cheat," and "to suck in" is "to take in, to cheat." Many more instances might be mentioned; but it is hardly necessary to go further than this, in order to show how the book is filled up and expanded, without rhyme or reason. Mr. Bartlett would have done better to take pattern from Halliwell's admirable dictionary, a work that contains nearly ten times as many entries as the Dictionary of Americanisms, but fills less than fifty more pages.

Coming now to genuine Americanisms, words and phrases really peculiar to this country, or used here in a sense never recognized in England — it is needless to take note of any that are correctly defined by Bartlett, his book being, as has been said, notwithstanding all its faults, indisputably the standard work of reference on this subject. Among those that he has either omitted, or about which his statements seem to invite remark, are the following :

*Blizzard.* — This remarkable word Mr. Bartlett defines as "a poser," having noticed, apparently, only a single instance of its use, and jumped at the conclusion that this is the meaning intended. He adds the comment, "not known in the Eastern States," which was generally true, no doubt, until the sharp winter of 1880-81 familiarized the term — as well as the thing itself, in a greatly modified form — to the residents of the East. I suppose I need not say that a real blizzard,

as the word is now understood, is a terrific storm, with low barometer, light clouds or none at all, "and the air full of particles of snow, in the form of dry, sharp crystals, which, driven before the wind, bite and sting like fire."\* The term is said to have made its first appearance in print about the year 1860, in a newspaper called the Northern Vindicator, published at Estherville, Minn. Its etymology can only be guessed at, but there has been no lack of guesses. The English word *blister*; the French *bouillard* (see Surenne's Dictionary); the German *blitz*; the Spanish *brisas*; the surname *Blizzard* (said to be common around Baltimore); an unpronounceable Sioux term; and the Scotch verb *blizzzen*, of which Jamieson's Dictionary remarks that "drought is said to be *blizzzening* when the wind parches and withers the fruits of the earth"—all these, and I know not how many other words in different languages, have been suggested, with various degrees of improbability, as the origin of the term. My own conjecture is, that it is simply an onomatopœia; an attempt, not wholly unsuccessful, to represent the whistling and "driving" noise of a terrible storm. It should be added, before leaving this word, that it seems to have been occasionally used in various places in the Eastern States, for a long time past, in significations quite different from its present meaning. Thus a newspaper correspondent writes from Solon, Me., to the effect that twenty or thirty years ago the phrase "let her blizzard" was common in that locality, meaning "let her go," as applied to the act of firing a gun or throwing a stone. Another, living in Perry County, Pa., has heard the word for many years as the equivalent of a drink—"let's take a blizzard." It is said also to have been in use in the same county in its present signification, as early as 1836, but to have become obsolete in this meaning, years ago. [Since this paragraph was set, I have received a letter from a well-informed friend at the West, who says: "This word is in common use in Texas, and has been for many years to describe a very severe 'norther.' It has been stated to me on competent authority that the thermometer has been known to register from, say, 86° down to 26°, the change being effected within the space of six or seven hours! This has always been popularly known as a blizzard. When the temperature in the summer season would be lowered only say 20°, it was known only as a norther. I think the term has gradually crept northward, until its significance is generally understood west of the Mississippi."]

*Boom*—A semi-slang expression (though it appears in the 1881 supplement to Worcester) descriptive of a sudden advance in popularity or in price. Said to be borrowed from the mining phraseology of the far West, where a process called "booming" is sometimes adopted to clear off surface soil and reveal supposed mineral veins. An artificial reservoir is constructed near the summit of a mountain, which is first allowed to fill with water and is then suddenly opened, whereupon a terrific torrent rushes down the slope, carrying rocks, trees, earth and all, with resistless force. A newspaper writer says he has "seen gullies fifty, seventy-five, and in some places a hundred feet deep, and

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\* *Cultivator and Country Gentleman*, Albany, N. Y., Vol. 44, p. 340.

extending the whole length of the mountain," cut out by single booms. "The word *booming*," he adds, "has therefore a very significant meaning, and is expressive as a word phrase, for it denotes an overwhelming, irresistible power and force."

*To buck against*—To oppose violently. I suppose this verb to be of American invention.

*Canaille*—Shorts, or low grades of flour; so defined in the Worcester Supplement, where it is said to be common in Canada and New England.

*Casket*—A kind of coffin. This first appears in the Webster Supplement of 1879.

*Coal*. Bartlett blunders fearfully in attempting to give the names of the different sizes of coal. His list is: 1, Broken or furnace coal, being the largest lumps; 2, Stove or range; 3, Pea or nut; 4, Egg; 5, Coal dust. I believe the correct nomenclature is: 1, Furnace; 2, Egg; 3, Stove; 4, Chestnut; 5, Pea; 6, Buckwheat; 7, Coal dust.

*Coral of lobster*—Unimpregnated eggs. Not in the dictionaries, except the Webster supplement, and incorrectly defined there.

*Dodger*—A small hand-bill; not in the dictionaries.

*Escalan*—Twelve and a-half cents, a New Orleans term not in the dictionaries.

*Fair*—An exhibition, not primarily for the purpose of sale. This very common American use of the word is not recognized by any dictionary in ordinary use, though the authority of a recent writer in the Westminister Review (No. 230, October, 1881, p. 247 of the Scott edition) may be cited in its support.

*French*—A term used in Maryland and Virginia for anything that is greatly disliked. "For instance," says a writer, "the tobacco gets the worm in it that destroys it; they call in 'frenching.' And if the children have the measles very bad, it is 'French,' and the same with a bad case of small-pox—it is the 'real French small-pox.'"

*Furore*—An excitement; not in any English dictionary, so far as I know, although it is found in one of Bartlett's citations, under the heading "Nick."

*Gripsack*—A recently-invented and rather vulgar term for a satchel, chiefly heard, I believe, at the West.

*Handglass*. Bartlett says handglasses are spectacles. My impression is that the term generally denotes a small looking-glass.

*Highwines*. I am not certain that this is an American coinage, but I believe it appears in no dictionary except the Worcester Supplement.

*Institute*—A convention. Farmers' institutes—meetings lasting two or three days, with lectures and discussions, are very common at the West; and there is a post-office called "Farmers' Institute" in Tippecanoe County, Ind.

*Keet*. Bartlett says "Guinea keets" are Guinea fowls. I think the "keets" are Guinea eggs—so called at the West. See Milwaukee

*Republican-Sentinel*, Dec. 7, 1882, (No. 12,551,) second page, second column.

*Liable for likely.* A vulgar error that sometimes creeps into good company. I have noticed two instances in the New York *Tribune*—one of them in an editorial. (“Guero is so hostile to the whites that he is liable to cut loose at any moment;” Jan. 2, 1880. “The Navy Department seems to have acted on the theory that the vessel is liable to turn up where she is least expected;” June 17, 1881.)

*Mung news.* Bartlett says this means false news. I have never heard the word; but a writer in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine for October, 1877, says it is the preterite of the old English verb *ming*, to mix—whence *mingle*—and means, not false, but confused, mingled, mixed up.

You *must not*, as the reverse of you *may*. I am inclined to think this is an Americanism, as I judge that the English generally say “you may not”—in which, if so, they are certainly more logical than we. “You *must*” means that an obligation rests upon you; therefore “you *must not*,” ought to mean merely that there is no obligation. “You *may*,” means that permission is granted, and therefore when permission is withheld and the action prohibited, the phrase ought to be “you *may not*,” instead of the universal American practice of saying “you *must not*.”

Closely allied to this, is the incorrect use of *can* for *may*, where there is no question of ability—which seems to be rather more prevalent in this country than in England. A line on the face of our postal-cards makes the absurd statement that “nothing but the address *can* be placed on this side.” The possessor of the card *can* place there any number of words that there is room for, if he pleases. What is meant is, of course, that nothing but the address *may* be placed there; that is, it is forbidden to place there anything else, under penalty of forfeiting the privilege of sending the card by mail. The English newspaper wrappers have a similar notice, correctly worded: “This wrapper *may* only be used for newspapers, or for such documents as are allowed to be sent at the book-rate.”

*Ninepence*—Twelve and a-half cents. Formerly used in New England and Virginia.

*Pit*—The stone of a fruit. “Mostly confined to New York State,” Bartlett says. I think the term is now common at the West, and used to some extent in the South, at least in Alabama.

*Railroad Nomenclature.* Bartlett gives a list of eighteen objects, pertaining to railroads, which have different names in the two countries; but fails to note that the American “buffer” is the English “bumper,” and the American “grade” the English “gradient.”

*Round-up*—An annual collection of cattle on the plains of the West, for branding and other purposes. Not in the dictionaries. Perhaps from Spanish *rodear*, to encompass.

*Smitch*—A very small quantity of anything. This word is noted

by a writer in Lippincott's Magazine for March, 1869, as peculiar to Carbon County, Pa. I have heard it in Albany.

*Solid-colored*—All of the same color. This expression, very common among breeders of Jersey cattle, and also used, I believe, in the dry-goods trade, may not be an Americanism perhaps, but no dictionary defines it.

*Spilth*—in the sense of street mud. This occurs in a story called "Alice Brand," by A. G. Riddle, published by the Appletons of New York in 1875, page 259.

*Super*. Bartlett says this is a contraction of "superintendent of factories, theatres," etc. What the "super" of a factory may be, if there is an official so called, I do not know; but the "super," or, as he is commonly called, the "supe" at a theatre, is certainly by no means a superintendent, but a supernumerary.

*Tenderfoot*—A new arrival from civilization in the wild regions of the far West—see Scribner's Monthly, vol. 18, p. 815. Not in the dictionaries. There is a post-office called "Tenderfoot" in Custer County, Dakota.

*Whiskey*. It is perhaps to Mr. Bartlett's credit that he does not seem to be very well "up" on the varieties of this popular beverage, as he remarks that "Bourbon whiskey is the best, being made of rye." As to the question of Bourbon's being the best, there may be differences of opinion; our Scotch and Irish friends, to say nothing of others, would perhaps dissent from the lexicographer's judgment; but as to Bourbon's being made of rye, we must all take exception to that statement, the fact being, I believe, that Bourbon never contains more than one-third of rye, and seldom as much as that.

To these genuine Americanisms may be added a few scientific or pseudo-scientific words, such as *phonograph*, *photophone*, *audiphone* and *lysimeter*. *Telephone*, as may not be generally known, is, like *telegraph*, much older than the apparatus that we now call by these terms; the original telegraph was a semaphore, and the original telephone, I believe, a speaking trumpet. And if time permitted, and the game were worth the candle, a numerous list of curious names of places, of American invention, might be compiled from the Post-Office Directory. Mr. Bartlett has done something at this, in his preface; but he failed to notice Why Not, Autumn Leaves, Bird-in-Hand and Youngwomanstown, Pa.; Bogus, Fiddletown, Hay Fork, Port Wine and Yankee Jim's, Cal.; Nola Chucky, Jim Ned, Mouse Tail, A. B. C. and U Bet, Tenn.; Long Year and The Corner, N. Y.; Hash Knife and Mud Creek, Texas; Star of the West, Sub Rosa and Gum Log, Ark.; Non Intervention, Va.; Quashquetown, Iowa; Medybemps, Me.; Rooster Rock, Oregon; Look Out, Dak.; Rabbit Hash, Ky.; Ty Ty, Geo.; Zig, Mo.; Skull Valley, Ariz.; Greenhorn, Left Hand, Ni Wot and O. Z., Col.; T. B., Md., and scores of other oddities that might be men-

tioned. It is a thousand pities that we have not preserved a greater number of the more euphonious geographical names of the aborigines; and it is to be sincerely hoped that as refinement and good taste become more general, we shall by degrees weed out most of these rough-and-ready appellations.

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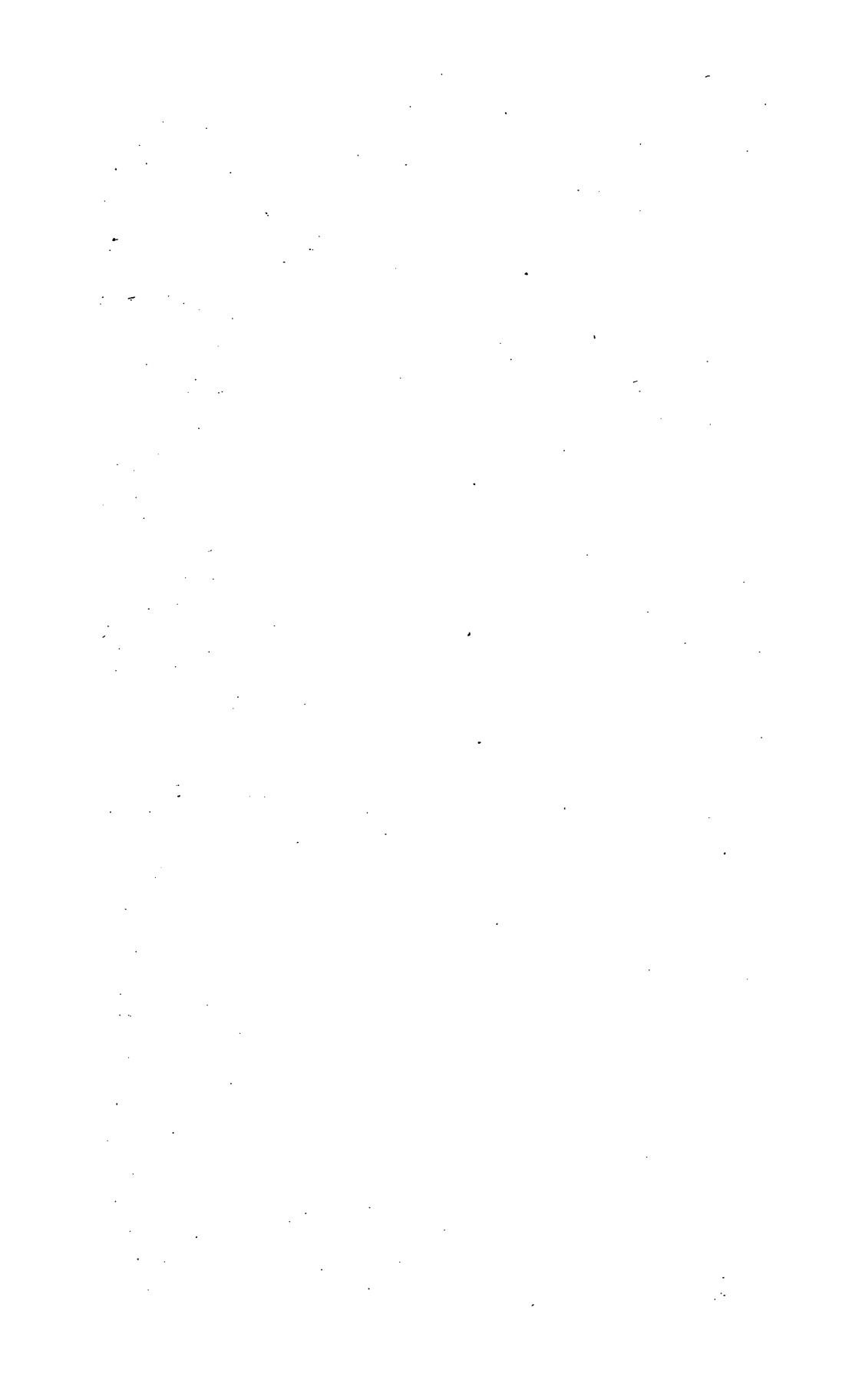
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NOTE.—The author of this paper will be greatly obliged for any corrections. Please address at Albany, N. Y.





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## LOCUTIUS IN FABRICA.

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# LOCUTIUS IN FABRICA.

BY GILBERT M. TUCKER.

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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ALBANY INSTITUTE,

JANUARY 6, 1885.

FROM TRANSACTIONS OF THE INSTITUTE, VOL. XI.

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Lucy George Finsol-

## LOCUTIUS IN FABRICA.

By GILBERT M. TUCKER.

[Read before the Albany Institute, Jan. 6, 1885.]

"Words are those Channels, by which the Knowledge of Things are conveyed to our Understandings: and therefore, upon a right Apprehension of them depends the Rectitude of our Notions; and in order to form our Judgments right, they must be understood in their proper Meaning, used in their true Sense, either in Writing or Speaking: For, if the Words of the Speaker or Writer, though ever so opposite to the Matter, be taken in a wrong Sense, they form erroneous Ideas in the mind concerning the Thing spoken or written of; and if we use Words in a false and improper Sense, this causes Confusion in the Understanding of the Hearer, and renders the Discourse unintelligible." — *Introduction to Bailey's Dictionary.*

In an office-building which I occasionally visit, is a dingy little room occupied as a shop by one of those useful men who can turn their hands to almost any mechanical task, from repairing a fine clock to building a cow-shed, and do it well. To the casual observer, the place is far from beautiful, and has a "cluttered-up" appearance suggestive of habits the reverse of orderly. The floor — where not occupied by benches, lathes, horses, and a rusty stove surmounted by a glue-kettle — is nearly concealed by bits of timber, shavings, and miscellaneous debris. The walls are lined with shelves and racks of many shapes, sizes and colors, obviously put up at different times, and constructed of odds and ends, with no thought of symmetry or harmony in their arrangement. And when one examines the tools themselves, they are found to form a collection almost equally promiscuous. No two have handles alike or look as if they came from the same maker. They are disposed in rude stands, boxes and cases of irregular forms, which seem to have been hastily adapted to their present purpose in default of anything better. Nothing could be more unlike the finely finished and ingeniously arranged "gentlemen's tool chests" that fascinate the eye of mechanically disposed visitors in hardware stores.

Yet the occupant of this little shop can lay his hand in a moment on any article in it, by day or by night, and knows the contents as you know the alphabet. And when he puts any implement into service, it is found to answer its purpose to very perfection. The chisels cut like razors; the saws follow the line without the deflection of a hair's-breadth; the lathes run exactly true; the vises and clamps hold like a

bad habit. For all their rude appearance, it would be hard to suggest any improvement in the practical working of this collection of heterogeneous apparatus.

Now I have often thought, while watching this mechanic at work, that his position (barring of course any question as to relative degrees of skill) is in some respects not unlike that of a member of the Institute preparing a paper for your consideration. Is not the English language, too, a seemingly disordered and inharmonious assemblage of implements, appliances and raw material? Our vocabulary is made up of importations from every country under heaven; our present tenses and their preterites, our individual terms and their significance in idiomatic phrases, our spoken words and their representatives in writing, have in scores of cases about as much seeming congruity as my mechanical friend's delicate watch-making lathe with the dirty table on which it stands and the rough box that covers it. And yet, what work can be accomplished with the English language! What distinction so fine, what conception so grand, what mental creation so lovely, that this unsymmetrical and in many respects unbeautiful tongue is inadequate (if one only knows how to use it) for putting it into permanent form for preservation? As a means for the expression of thought, our modified Anglo-Saxon in the hands of a master excels the comparatively regular languages of antiquity and of many savage peoples, as the mechanic's unattractive tools excel for practical purposes the handsome but untrustworthy contents of the "gentlemen's tool-chests." Less sonorous than German, less sparkling than French, less musical than Spanish, less logical and systematic by far in its structure than Latin, less flexible than Greek, how it surpasses them all for meeting the varied necessities of mankind!

And does not this parallelism suggest a useful lesson to certain hypercritical critics whose wont it is to act the part of grand inquisitors as to the legitimacy of the new terms which are constantly appearing in our language, often to supply real and important wants? A great hubbub was made by this class of people on the introduction of the now well established noun *starvation*, which even Mr. Skeat, notwithstanding his usual liberality of judgment, condemns as a "ridiculous hybrid." Hybrid of course it is—an Anglo-Saxon root with a Latin suffix, as if one were to fit a rough hickory handle into a highly polished lignum-vitæ mallet. But consider the circumstances. The implement was badly needed; the materials of which it was constructed were the best at hand at the moment, or the best that were thought of; and it answers its purpose well. Can we afford to discard it because it is not handsome in appearance? *Reliable* has fallen under the ban of the same class of thinkers. It is badly formed, no

doubt; but so, for that matter, is its parent, the universally accepted verb *rely*, and still more so the unchallenged noun *reliance*, consisting as this does of an English root with a French prefix and suffix, like an old, well-worn spoke-shave with a pair of brand new handles. (As to the other objection to *reliable*—that we do not *rely a thing* but *rely upon it*, and therefore the adjective ought to be *rely-upon-able*, any comment may safely be deferred until people begin saying *laugh-atable* instead of *laughable*; the principle is the same in both cases.) Fault is perpetually found with *talented*, on the ground that participles ought not to be formed from nouns; and perhaps they ought not, in a strictly logical and regular language; but a tongue that already includes *diseased*, *gifted*, *lettered*, *bigoted*, *turreted*, *landed*, *towered*, *blooded*, *cultured*, *acred*, *steepled*, *mitred*, *coped*, *tipped*, *booted*, *spurred*, *horned*, *unprincipled* and *widowed*, will hardly suffer much by admitting one more formation of the same anomalous kind. *Stand-point*, *wash-tub*, *shoe-horn*, *cook-stove* and *go-cart* (*boot-jack* might have been added) are set down as abominations, “slovenly and uncouth,” by a popular writer on correctness in speech, because they do not conform in their structure to a somewhat complicated canon which he lays down as the law for making “compounds of this kind.” His argument is a complete non-sequitur. The laws relating to the development of a language are to be deduced from the history of that development, just as the so-called laws of nature are merely generalized statements of observed facts. And in regard to these expressions, which our acceptance of his canon would require us to condemn, it must be noticed that they are not only briefer (always an advantage) but actually clearer than those which the critic would substitute for them. The meaning of a *cooking-stove*, to be sure, is not greatly liable to misapprehension; nor perhaps is that of a *washing tub*; but *booting juck* is open to the manifest objection that it is not for booting but for un-booting, so to speak, that the implement is designed, while *shoeing horn* suggests an entirely wrong idea—we do not speak of the process of dressing our feet as “shoeing” them; and what sort of a description of the well known nursery machine would it be to call it a “going cart”?

The fact of the matter seems to be that while of course it is desirable that the development of the language should proceed on regular lines and in conformity with logical principles, yet it is by no means essential to the usefulness of a word that it should be thus formed; and if only the word is useful, we can well afford to admit it to our already heterogeneous vocabulary, the vocabulary being all the more serviceable in many ways on account of the variety and lack of unity among its constituent parts. The important question in all such

cases, looking at them from the mechanical point of view, is, have we need of this tool, and is it the best we can readily procure? If so, we shall be just so much the poorer for rejecting it on account of its uncouth appearance.

It ought to be remembered indeed that our list of words, numerous as it is, is yet not comprehensive enough to fulfill the highest ideal of a perfect tongue. We need more tools, a good many of them, and it sometimes seems a pity rather that we cannot manufacture and introduce them when the need is perceived than that some of those we have, offend in their composition the strict requirements of congruity. We badly need, for instance, epicene pronouns in the singular answering to *they*, *them* and *their* in the plural. True it is, one can often use *he*, *him* and *his*, expecting hearers or readers to remember that "the brethren embrace the sistern." True it also is, one can often get around the difficulty by rearranging a sentence; but there is a difficulty, for all that. A man wishes to say that each of his two children, a boy and a girl, has the exclusive use of a bedroom. He naturally begins: "Each of my children has a room to"—how shall he finish? It is not quite right to say that each has a room to *himself*, or to *herself*, and it is certainly far from grammatical or pleasing to say *themselves*. What shall he do? The problem is of daily occurrence, as any one will find who will take pains to watch for it.

We need, too, a preterite for the verb *ought*. We are compelled to say, "you ought to have done such and such things"—which is by no means what we really mean. One cannot possibly be under obligation to *have done* anything—the phrase is absurd; all obligation is *to do*, and it would be an important gain in the direction of clearness and conciseness if we might say, when speaking of past time, "you oughted."

We need, again, a word almost synonymous with *many*, but having a slightly different shade of meaning—a lack which is often supplied, awkwardly and incorrectly, by the use of *numerous* with a plural noun. People say, "there are numerous books on that subject"—which is clearly ungrammatical; there may be a numerous *list* of book, but that expression, correct in syntax, does not seem quite to express the idea; and to say there are *many* books may be rather too strong a statement.

We need, once more, a verb for which *replace* is commonly substituted, there being nothing better at hand. One removes a painting from his wall and hangs up an engraving in its stead. For a brief statement of this action, we have at present nothing better than to say that the painting was replaced by the engraving. Yet this is really nonsense. To replace a thing is to put it back where it was before.

Here, as in the case of *numerous*, we may be said to lack a gimlet and find ourselves compelled to bore holes, blunderingly and unsatisfactorily, with the blade of a pen-knife.

Then there are not a few adverbs which one meets in foreign tongues and finds so useful that he wonders at himself for never having noticed the absence of corresponding words in English. Familiar examples are *freundlich* and *hoffentlich* in German. One cannot say in English, "He received me friendlily," convenient as it would sometimes be to do so, neither *kindly* nor *cordially* quite answering the purpose. Nor can one say: "The doctor has hopeably given the right medicine." If you presume he has done so, you may say *presumably*; if you are sure of it, you have *undoubtedly*; but if you only desire to express a pretty strong hope, you must cast your sentence in another mould.

At the same time, we have certainly bad words enough — bad, not because they are irregular in form or composed of incongruous elements, but because they are for some other reason (adopting Noah Webster's sententious expression) nonsensical. *Helpmeet* is one of these monsters. The result of a stupid blunder in running together a noun and an adjective that stand separate in the familiar verse in Genesis, it can hardly be called a word at all; it means nothing in particular, and is worse than useless. *Dissever, disannul, unravel, lesser*, and similar feeble attempts at unnecessary emphasis, are other instances; *sever, annul, ravel, less*, answer the purpose completely, with the advantage of smaller bulk; the addition of the extra syllable is like giving a screw-driver two handles. Equally useless for the most part is the school-ma'amish insistence upon indicating, by the addition of *ess*, the feminine gender in a number of nouns indicative of occupation or position. Sometimes of course the sex of the person referred to has a direct bearing upon her relations to her calling, as in the case of an actress, whom it is often doubtless well to discriminate, in speech as in thought, from an actor. But it can hardly be maintained that any such necessity exists in the case of a woman who may happen to be an editor, a postmaster, a manager, or a poet. Yet we read not unfrequently of editresses and postmistresses; the dignified Westminster Review finds *poet* not sufficiently distinct when the poet is a woman, and gives its sanction to *poetess*; and the Illustrated London News, which often devotes a considerable portion of one of its most entertaining departments to discussions of colloquial English, its meaning and its proprieties, is actually guilty of *manageress!* Here as before the extra syllable is merely an incumbrance; we could not only get along just as well without it; we should actually do better.

Another class of bad words — bad because they do not mean what they are supposed to mean — is exemplified in *gasometer*. The fact

that it consists of a term invented in Belgium not much more than two hundred years ago, and a word from classical Greek, welded together, nobody knows why, by the letter *o* — is of no consequence ; but what is of consequence is, that it means a measurer of gas and is understood as indicating a reservoir of gas. In the name of common sense, when one means a gas-holder, why not say so ? *Hydropathy*, too, is a disgrace to the language. *Homœopathy* (similar sickness) is correct, indicating as it does a method of treatment based on the belief that “like cures like”; and *allopathy* (different sickness), though of course rather a nickname than a scientific term, may pass muster as designating the practice that commonly relies on agencies which are found to *reverse* the symptoms of the patient. *Hydropathy* (water sickness) can only be accounted for by supposing that the inventor of the word imagined that it might mean water-cure, which of course it cannot.

But by far the most important suggestion offered by the analogies of the little shop, relates to the folly of *misusing* our verbal tools ; and just here is the one great point of dissimilarity between the English language and the equipment of my friend’s work-room. A mallet may be highly polished as to its head and rough-hewn as to its handle, and yet give entire satisfaction. But it would hardly work well on chisels, if the owner were in the habit of using it to drive nails. That is exactly what we not unfrequently do in speech, and the natural result follows ; the nails are not driven straight, and we presently find that we have spoiled our mallet. We speak for instance of *preposterous* statements, meaning only that they are *incorrect* or *absurd*. Now *preposterous* is not properly synonymous with either of these adjectives, but has a definite meaning of its own which can be expressed by no other word, signifying as it does the putting of something first which ought to be last — the getting of the cart before the horse, as it were. We are badly compensated for losing the power of expressing this idea in a single word, by gaining a new and hardly distinguishable synonym for *absurd*.

A mallet which has been so persistently used as a hammer by the legal profession, without sense or necessity, as to be pretty effectually ruined, is *enjoin*. It can hardly be necessary to remark that to enjoin a course of conduct is to urge that it be followed ; the lawyers, oddly enough, have so perverted the meaning as to reverse it completely ; in their dialect, to enjoin an act is to forbid it ! Thus I read in the Albany Law Journal (vol. 28, page 43) that “in *Leete v. Pilgrim Church*, St. Louis Court of Appeals, the ringing of church chimes between 9 P. M. and 7 A. M. was enjoined. The court refused to enjoin the ringing for worship on Sunday or in the daylight hours, and con-

tinued: ‘But the striking of the clock at night must, we think, be relegated to the category of useless noises. \* \* \* We therefore think that the striking of the hours upon the largest bell between the hours of 9 P. M. and 7 A. M. ought to be enjoined’! Of course this means that while the court declined to order the ringing of the church bell on Sunday or by daylight during the week, it did command that the chimes should be faithfully operated between nine at night and seven in the morning. Of course also the writer of the paragraph, and the learned judge who prepared the opinion, intended that their words should mean the precise opposite. The mallet in their hands is absolutely spoiled for its legitimate purpose, and to what possible profit? Meaning *forbidden*, why could they not say *forbidden*? Or if it is considered desirable to have a special word to signify the formal forbidding of an action by a writ, far, far better would it be to raise to respectability a term which is now ranked with the vilest newspaper slang, and say that the action is “injuncted.” It may be answered that this horrible word, if it means anything, must be synonymous with *enjoin*; but the fact is, it has never been used except to signify *forbidden by injunction*; and as for its irregular formation, one who cares more for the substance of the language, its real serviceableness in expressing thought, than for the refinements of grammatical science, will easily disregard that objection. The nail must be driven; the only hammer we have is “*forbid*”; this it seems will not answer; then for heaven’s sake let us pick up even a shapeless stone like “*injunct*” rather than spoil our excellent mallet “*enjoin*.<sup>\*</sup>”\*

\*A portion of this paragraph was printed in the Albany Law Journal (with editorial commendation) shortly after the presentation of the paper to the Institute, and elicited a number of indignant letters from lawyers, not one of which really attacked the position above assumed. Their chief burden was to maintain that a man may properly be *enjoined from doing a certain action* — which nobody disputed; the question (if there can be any question) is, whether one may say that “*the action* is enjoined,” meaning that the action is forbidden. Another stated that “neither the verb ‘to enjoin’ nor its substantive ‘injunction’ is exclusively used, even in legal phraseology, in the sense of prohibition;” nobody said it was — the point is, that it ought *never* to be so used. Another solemnly quoted — of all authorities in the world, on a question of verbal accuracy — *Webster’s Dictionary!* — as if everybody did not know that all kinds of error in speech which have obtained any sort of respectable currency can be defended by citations from that useful but bloated compilation. The editor of the Law Journal, closing the discussion, summed up the whole matter thus: “What Mr. Tucker complains of is that the same word is used to mean two exactly opposite things — to do and not to do. This verbal blowing hot and cold in the same breath is certainly indefensible. It is ‘overworking’ the verb — to quote Rufus Choate. We have plenty of good words to express the desired meaning — ‘prohibit,’ ‘restrain,’ ‘forbid.’ There is no need of corrupting and vulgarizing the language by this double and ambiguous use. When we want to prohibit the ringing of bells, for example, let us not say it is ‘enjoined,’ *i. e.*, commanded; nor worse yet, ‘enjoined and forbidden,’ *i. e.*, both commanded and prohibited; but let us say just what we mean in the correct use of the language, forbidden and prohibited. We are no purist nor ‘philological fancier,’ but we think that this use of the word ‘enjoin’ is radically wrong.”

Then there is *aggravating* for *exasperating*. The distinction has been pointed out a thousand times. Everybody knows that to aggravate is to make worse. A man's crime may be aggravated by the circumstances; to say that the man himself is aggravated, means, not that he is annoyed, but that, being an evil at best, he is made a greater nuisance than he has been. Yet it is surprising how many influential writers, especially in England, insist on confounding the terms. Dickens does so over and over again in *Great Expectations*: "The Romans must have aggravated one another very much with their noses;" "Mr. Wopsle's Roman nose aggravated me;" "This was so very aggravating, the more especially as I found myself making no way against his surly obtuseness;" "Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb's boy." I read the other day in the *Mark Lane Express* of persons who "jerk the reins in that aggravating manner." A pamphlet, lately published in London, and relating to a certain class of books in the British Museum, is entitled "*Aggravating Ladies.*" Most surprising of all perhaps is the following, from the *Westminster Review* (October, 1881, p. 284, Scott edition): "The selections from the *Giaour* are exceedingly aggravating." It must however be admitted that the blunder is not exclusively British, for whoever reads that excellent book, "*The Calling of a Christian Woman,*" issued only last year by the Rev. Morgan Dix, S. T. D., rector of Trinity Church, New York, will find on page 22 a reference to "the words of St. Paul, peculiarly aggravating to the ears of modern revolutionists."

Among the great number of other verbal mallets which are often foolishly misused as hammers, the following may be mentioned — the list might be indefinitely extended, but it is the present purpose merely to illustrate the principle :

*Executive* for *secret*, in the phrase "*executive session.*" It is generally understood that when the Senate engages in what is properly enough called "*executive business,*" as the consideration of appointments or treaties, spectators are excluded; and from this has arisen a ridiculous custom on the part of various voluntary associations and committees of resolving to "*go into executive session*" when it is only meant that private business is to be taken up with closed doors. The blunder is doubtless largely due to the usual preference of ill-trained minds for fine and high-sounding words.

*Restive* for *uneasy*.—Here is a word which shares with *enjoin* the remarkable bad fortune of having been completely reversed in meaning by bad usage.\* A restive horse is a lazy horse that wants to rest, and by no means, as sometimes seems to be supposed, a nervous horse that wants to go.

*Fabulous for very great.*—One may properly speak of the fabulous wealth of an impostor, meaning the property that he falsely pretends to have. But what nonsense it is, when one thinks of it, to say that a lady's jewels are of "fabulous value," meaning that they cost a great deal of money!

*Impertinent for insolent.*—An impertinent remark is one that has no connection with the matter under discussion. But the use of the term ought not to imply any censure on the good manners of the person referred to.

*Temperance and Protective.*—Without expressing any opinion as to the advisability of indulging in alcoholic beverages, one may properly denounce, from grammatical considerations only, the absurdity of speaking of a man who abjures them entirely, as "strictly temperate;" how can one be temperate in the use of that which he does not use? And similarly, without expressing any opinion as to the wisdom of a national policy of limiting importations from foreign countries, one may point out that the name "protective tariff," as applied to a tariff by which this result is brought about, is objectionable, for the reason that it begs the whole question at issue. Such a tariff *restricts, limits*. Whether it really *protects* anything, in any proper application of the term, is disputed.

*Dividend.*—It may be worth while to call attention to the obvious fact that a dividend is that which is to be divided. A railroad's dividend, for instance, is a certain share of the profits, set aside by the directors for division among the stockholders. It is sometimes convenient, of course, and perhaps not highly censurable, to speak of one of the proprietors as receiving "his dividend," meaning his *share of* the dividend; but it should be remembered that this expression is only justifiable as a rough sort of contraction, much like saying "governments" and "railroads" when one means government bonds and railroad securities; and it is to be regretted that the definition of *dividend* in each of the two English dictionaries most in use in this country is so worded as apparently to confuse *dividend* with *quotient*. Webster's, as usual, is a little worse than Worcester's.

*Circumstance for event.*—We continually hear people say that they will "relate a circumstance" that occurred under their own observation. A circumstance occur! They might as well speak of the motionless scenery at a theatre as performing.

*Demean for debase.*—This blunder seems to have arisen partly from an imagined relationship between the verb *demean* and the adjective *mean*, and partly from the fact that the verb is used in a good many rather familiar passages in old and standard writers, in such connection that *debase* would have made equally good sense. A rec-

ollection of the noun *demeanor*, which is certainly not synonymous with *debasement*, ought to be a sufficient correction of the error.

*Merchant* for *tradesman* or *shopkeeper*. — In the older and better use of the first word, it was strictly confined to persons who carried on foreign traffic. To call retail dealers “merchants” is to multiply synonyms uselessly, at the cost of losing a very convenient distinction.

*Sustain* for *receive*. — Chiefly in daily-paper language; “the victim sustained a trifling bruise on his arm.” Well, it would have been remarkable if he had not “sustained” a wound of that description. The writer was, of course, trying to say that the person *received* the wound. How hard it is, sometimes, to be simple!

*Liable* for *likely*. — A wrongdoer is liable to punishment. To say that he is “liable to escape,” meaning that he is *likely* to escape, is to commit an error that is really comical in its absurdity, when one compares the true meaning of the sentence with the idea intended to be conveyed.

*Monopoly*. — The frequent and glaring misuse of this term is of no little importance, as it leads to confusion of thought and sometimes to very ill-advised political action. A monopoly is, of course, an industry that is protected from competition by legal enactment. Demagogues of the Dennis Kearney stripe are doing their best to lead the unthinking multitude to apply the term to industries which are perfectly open to competition but in which, for one reason or another, nobody cares to compete — a very widely different thing. The owner of a patent has a monopoly; but the notion that railroading, banking or gas-making can be a monopoly, as long as all the world is at liberty to engage therein if it pleases, is at once grotesque and dangerous.

The list stretches out indefinitely; one knows not where to stop. It seems that on this subject, as on some others, there is verily need of line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a good deal. Yet one word of caution must be added. The doctrine that words should not be used to convey ideas foreign to their real meaning, ought never to be so perverted as to interfere with their employment in a secondary, derivative or figurative sense, the legitimate out-growth of their primary significance. A single illustration will make this clear. The verb to *endorse* means to put on the back of; and the United States post-office department takes a mallet for a hammer with a vengeance when it informs the senders of registered letters, by a placard displayed in many post-offices, that such letters “require the name of the sender to be endorsed on the face of the envelope!” Endorsed on the face! The writer of this notice — who doubtless imagined that *endorsed* was merely a more elegant synonym for *written* — might as well speak of hoisting a load down. But no small

quantity of what I venture to think rather wooden-headed criticism has been expended on the use of the same verb to signify *approve* or *sanction*, as in the common expression, to endorse a candidate or a movement. It seems to be forgotten that in the usual application of the term — the endorsing of a note or a check — we have always in mind, not only the fact that something is actually written on the back of the paper in question, but also and chiefly the far more important fact that the writer of the endorsement, in putting down his name, agrees to warrant and defend the holder of the document against loss resulting from his confidence in it. In other words, he may be said to *back up* the original maker. And just as it is indisputably good English to speak of a man's friends as backing him, so is it absolutely good English to speak of a lawyer endorsing a layman's opinion about a legal question, or a scholar endorsing the positions maintained in a book on classical subjects. To object to such use of language as this, is to push grammatical criticism to an extreme that is likely only to render it ridiculous, though if the critics could persuade the people to follow them, it would result in a senseless limitation of our choice of words — a real and by no means inconsiderable injury to the language.











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